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I attach a somewhat undigested report on the Banbury meeting I just attended. My "executive summary" is that most journals remain reluctant to join PMC under the new, far more lenient, terms, let alone endorse anything like the open access to the literature we would all like to see. A few publishers appear moving towards PMC (CSH Press, ASM, maybe Nature), but they are clearly in the minority. There is now no doubt in my mind that we need to move forward with creating alternate publishing options that embody the spirit of PLoS, both to demonstrate that it can be done, and, more importantly, to provide an avenue of publication for the people who have signed the letter. I would like to discuss this and other points by conference call next week. If you can participate please send email to me letting me know when you will be available.

-Mike

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CONFIDENTIAL [I was informed by various organizers and attendees that proceedings of Banbury meetings are confidential, although it was acceptable to report back to you about what happened]

Greetings PLoS'ers,

Despite serious misgivings, I did, in the end, decide to attend the recent meeting at Cold Spring Harbor. In the end, I am glad I went and wish to update you on what transpired. This is in no particular order and is stream of consciousness.

The meeting was dominated by publishers. There were representatives of Elsevier, Wiley, Oxford University Press, Nature (Phil Campbell), HighWire (John Sack), Cell Press (Kevin Davies), Science, ASM (Sam Kaplan), Rockefeller Press, ACS, ASBMB (Chuck Hancock) and Cold-Spring Harbor (John Inglis). The other attendees were myself, the CSHL librarian, Nick Cozarelli (who I guess is also a publisher, although I will avoid lumping him with them here), Bruce Stillman, Joe Sambrook and a few others who came and went. Bruce Alberts and David Lipman also stopped by.

Although I learned a lot about where the publishers stand, the meeting was not particularly productive. The only tangible product of the meeting is a list of questions/demands from the publishers (which I will summarize below) to PMC that they claim are their 15 most serious objections to joining.

I'll start with some encouraging news.

First, CSH Press has now agreed to join PMC under the new track II (where material is deposited in PMC for searching purposes, but all requests for documents go back to the journal websites, with the requirement that access to the documents be free within one year of publication) and it appears that ASM will follow suit (Sam Kaplan, who was representing the ASM here is going to propose this to the board in a few weeks and he thought it was likely they would agree). Unfortunately, the representatives of AAAS, ASBMB, and ACS did not sound like their societies were ready to follow.

The other good news was that all of the scientists in attendance (Bruce Stillman, Bruce Alberts, Joe Sambrook) were clearly supportive of PMC, and to a reasonable extent, the broader goals contained in our open letter. It was also clear that these guys were not buying any of the publishers arguments against PMC. In fact, their positions seemed to harden in support of PMC and to some extent PLoS as the journals put forth one bad objection after another.

The publishers were certainly not monolithic. Obviously PNAS was strongly on our side. ASM was pretty good, although not really willing to endorse anything more than PMC Track II (which is now known as the "Cozarelli Compromise"). The ACS and JCB representatives were fairly quiet, although in my private interactions with them they sounded fairly moderate, if a bit timid, in their stances. The AAAS guy seemed generally reasonable, although he was very business focused and seemed unwilling and unable to

accept the notion that this decision should be made by anyone but AAAS. I think, in general, the society peoples stance can be summed up as receptive, but extremely cautious. The one notable exception was Chuck Hancock from ASBMB. He was outright hostile from the start. He was rude and abusive to me from the start. We've never met before, but, before being introduced, he was hurling various forms of invective at me at dinner, and continued to do this for the entire meeting. I really think he behaved like a complete jerk at this meeting. He seems to have a serious personal problem with both PMC and PloS that renders him incapable of discussing any of the underlying issues. He actually said that the main reason that they were not even considering joining PMC was the affront they felt about our open letter (more on this point later).

The commercial publishers – with the exception of Nature – were horrible. There was a woman from Elsevier who made it clear that they are not really interested in PMC even with the “Cozarelli Compromise” in place. Her alternatives were truly laughable – mostly CrossRef, which is a system for giving every paper a unique ID that can be used to direct links from citations to full-text. After insisting that publishers spend a great deal of time finding out what their users want, she actually admitted that it had never occurred to her that full-text searching was something scientists want. In fact, a number of the publishers insisted that the value of full-text searching was overrated. In my mind, nothing proves their inability and unworthiness to control how the literature is used than this completely absurd assertion. The Wiley rep was more reasonable (although this is a relative thing as he repeatedly referred to me and PloS as the radical fringe), but it is also clear that they do not want to make anything freely available that they think might possible someday in the future have some value. They were reluctant to place material in PMC under the Cozarelli Compromise – even material that they currently make freely available within a year – because they wanted to reserve the right to make people pay to access this material some time in the future if they someday figure out a good way to make money off of it. Quite a noble position. The woman from OUP was much quieter than the Elsevier and Wiley reps, but she seemed to back their general stance.

Nature was a pleasant surprise. I had never met Phil Campbell before, but I found him to be extremely thoughtful and forward thinking, if not actually supportive. He was the only publisher who seemed to see the benefits of a future in which the scientific literature is openly accessible and useable. I think we should make a serious effort to work with him on something that is compatible with both our interests (more on this below).

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In the first session – “What do scientists want?”, Bruce Alberts and Bruce gave good statements about why we might want full-text databases, although they didn't really go beyond issues of access.

David Lipman then arrived and gave a presentation on PMC in general and the new Track II publishing option. He fielded a few questions from publishers, but then he had to leave. We discussed some issues around PMC in a somewhat disorganized fashion. Then, one of the most remarkable things at the meeting happened. Someone asked the publishers what it would take for them to join PMC. They then listed up on the board 15

issues that they wanted to see addressed or resolved by PMC. A short summary of their “demands” follows (I’ve fused some of the points together).

- 1) Journals must be allowed to retain copyright.
- 2) PMC should accept articles that have delays to free release longer than 1 year (including infinity)
- 3) PMC should archive non-primary research content.
- 4) The economic health of the journals should be more completely considered.
- 5) The risk of “government interference” in scientific publishing should be minimized by making mirror sites and by making the governance of PMC more transparent. They also want more publisher involvement in the PMC governing board.
- 6) The publishers are concerned that PMC might change the rules of the game in mid-road, so they want some kind of “contract” with PMC.
- 7) The publishers are concerned that participating in PMC will lead to lost opportunities by squeezing out better options. They are particularly concerned about doing anything “irreversible” like joining PMC with the condition that, should they stop making their content freely available after a year, the material would be made freely available on PMC.
- 8) PMC should reach out more to the publishers and try to actively solicit their participation.

OK. That’s a summary of 14/15 points. However, when asked what the most important reason they don’t want to participate in PMC they all agreed that it was the relationship between PMC and Public Library of Science. They said, in no uncertain terms, that the fact that Pat and Harold were active in both PMC and PloS was a major reason for them not wanting to have anything to do with PMC. Although I find this utterly despicable, I did go to great lengths to make it clear that the two were not equivalent, by first making it clear that PloS and PMC are decidedly not the same, that PMC has its own goals and objectives that are not the same as PloS. I also told them that joining PMC was not truly equivalent to agreeing to our PloS principles, but that I thought many signers of the open letter would view full participation in PMC as a step in the right direction and a good faith effort on the part of the journals to support open access.

I have to say I was stunned at the level of anger and animosity directed at me at the meeting (which I presume was directed at PloS). I take this both as a sign that we have been successful and as a sign of how unwilling the commercial journals (and many of the non-profits as well) are to support building a more accessible and useable scientific literature.

Phil Campbell and Sam Kaplan aside, I really thought the journals showed no interest in what we had to say. They seemed completely stuck on the idea that – whatever the merits of our proposals – that they were completely unwilling to discuss anything that they thought might threaten their bottom lines. I tried repeatedly to get them to discuss possible alternative economic models for how journal activities – especially manuscript selection and peer review – might be supported, but they really seemed uninterested. This

made it absolutely clear to me that we are not going to be able to work with most of the journals at this time. They are just not interested in what we are saying. My response was (and I said this explicitly) – fine, you are entitled to your beliefs and can continue to act this way, but that they could not expect us, or indeed the scientific community in general, to accept this decision. Therefore, I made it perfectly clear that I (and I hope all of us and others as well) intend to provide the 15,000 scientists who signed the letter and the many other who I believe support us, with alternate places to publish, edit and review for. I think this is the single thing that I took home from this meeting. WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING NOW. David Lipman, Nick and Pat all seconded this, and others among us have said so previously.

So, with this in mind, I approached Phil Campbell, with whom I was really impressed and pitched to him the idea of starting a new journal with the Nature name, that was the perfect implementation of the PloS ideal – no ownership, immediate deposition in PMC, etc... The costs of publication would come from charges on submissions and/or page charges. I told Phil that many (if not all) of us, and many others who had signed the letter, would be happy to serve as editors for this journals and to submit our best work there. The modest additional cost would be more than compensated by the good this would be doing. I think this would be good for us, as it would create one important part of the puzzle – a PloS compliant high-profile journal. We would get immediate name recognition and credibility and we would be able to take advantage of Nature's infrastructure. Phil said he was very interested in continuing this discussion. I made it clear to him that this is something we (and I hope this means all of us) are planning on doing, and that we would love to have Nature as our partner, but if it doesn't work for them we will find someone else.

Now this still doesn't solve the problem of what the large fraction of the other people who signed the letter are going to do. There have been informal discussion about other "lower-level" alternatives and I think we need to pursue these. The obvious possibility is to supplement a high-level journal with a broad mechanism for peer-review and electronic publication of any article. I'm thinking of something along the lines of BioMed Central, although I think it would be best if it were separate and entirely non-profit. This is not something I advocate lightly. I realize it would be a hell of a lot of work for someone (including myself) and would require some form of seed money, but I just don't see an alternative. I don't feel it would be right to abandon either the principles of PloS or the people who have signed the letter.